



From Personal to Social Transformation: A Phenomenological Study on the Life of 'Kyai Kampung'

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Abstract

Kyai Kampung, religious leader at the village level, is the pillar of Indonesian Islam. The study aims to explore phenomenologically the experiences of "kyai kampung" at Madrasah 'Tasywiqul Mustarsyidin' Demak, Central Java, Indonesia. This study specifically emphasizes how personal transformation could result into larger social transformation. The experiences of Kyai Kampung at Maredan Village, Demak, Central Java reveals that certain principles of life drawn from a rich religious tradition have empowered local religious leader to transform himself and his community. Religious tradition and local wisdom shape their daily life and self-identity. Under the pressure of modernization and globalization values which are dominated by the value of consumerism and materialism, the kyais are still holding strongly the value of 'ikhlas' in their teaching tradition. Even though they strongly hold Islamic religious teaching, they do not ignore the importance of local culture in their daily lives.

Abstrak

Studi ini, secara fenomenologis dilakukan untuk mengeksplor pengalaman hidup (dalam mengajar) para Guru di Madrasah 'Tasywiqul Mustarsyidin' Desa Maredan, Kabupaten Demak, Jawa Tengah, dengan menekankan pada proses refleksi sosial-keagamaan yang menghasilkan adanya transformasi personal dan sosial. Pengalaman hidup para Kyai Kampung ini sangatlah unik. Tradisi dan kearifan lokal menjadi ciri khas identitas dan gaya hidup mereka sehari-hari. Meski arus modernisasi dan globalisasi yang didominasi oleh nilai-nilai konsumerisme dan materialisme juga deras mengalir dalam berbagai sendi kehidupan sosial di sana, tetapi prinsip hidup 'Ikhlas' tetap menjadi hal utama bagi mereka. Meskipun ajaran Islamnya sangat kuat, tetapi para Kyai Kampung ini tidak pernah mengabaikan nilai-nilai tradisi dan kearifan lokal dalam praktek kehidupan sehari-hari.

Keywords: kyai kampung; lived experiences; personal and social transformation

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INTRODUCTION

Every religion basically has a great power that can affect and direct its believers. How and what kind of influence it affect, of course highly depends on who embraces, carries, and passes on its teaching values.

Generally, in every religion, there are individuals, communities, or institutions that move on the basis of spirit to share, do good things, and show concern for fellow human beings. As a source of kindness, religion is believed to come in order to solve the problems of humanity, such as poverty, injustice, and other various social inequalities. This is because the essence of every religion is the spirit of humanity.

In addition, every religion has always embraced two dimensions: vertical and horizontal dimensions. The humanity spirit of religion itself is included as part of horizontal dimension. This is different from the vertical dimension which concerns on the concept of God, procedures of worship, as well as the requirements to get a 'ticket' to heaven: in which every religion has their own standards and procedures (ICRP, 2011). Ideally, these differences should be able to make the followers of any other religion can understand and respect others' choices. Understanding and respecting other religions do not mean that a person must agree to the vertical dimension of those different religious teachings.

The current situation that has happened lately implies that religion is solely focusing greatly on the vertical dimension, so they tend to forget the horizontal dimension. Everything which is related to religious ethics is emphasized, while everything which is related to the social order is set aside or regarded as secondary priority.

If religions are always stuck in the dispute of difference, especially concerning on the concept of God, worship, and so forth, then sooner or later, religions will lose their spirit. The disputes regarding the conception of different religions in a pluralistic society will lead people to think that religion is not a blessing but a source of disaster. Religion which is supposed to be a source of kindness and solve humanity problems will

emerge as source devastation for the people. Religion is supposed to manifest as a peacemaker; the opposite will be promoting social unrest. In fact, being faithful means to maintain the trust (the sacred mandate from God) to humanity toward others (Nurcholish Madjid 1982: 115). Therefore, those who believe it should not bother, hurt, or harm others for any reason.

The religious conflict that have occurred for all this time, when we examine it through deep analysis, are not because of fundamental problems (substantial issues), but only symbolic level. Mass organizations that defend their religions actually also are within this symbolic level. They use religious legitimacy for personal use, which is actually not related to religion.

Therefore, restoring the spirit of humanity in religion should be the focus of a struggle every religious believer does in order to create peace. One of them is to respect the values and forms of human culture. The emphasis of his struggle is how people can respect, maintain, improve, and preserve the culture. Therefore, religion will not be regarded as scourge that serves as a 'bulldozer' to local cultures.

The phenomenon of today's intolerance, radicalism and religious extremism also become a threat to the basic objective revelation of religion itself. Morally, it is unlikely that anyone would be proud if they see religious people commit terrible acts in the name of religion. Terrorism cases, until the emergence of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) with some of horrible actions, at least as appeared through the news from various media, is an adequate real proof. In fact, religion has provided examples that doing good for the life of the world is the same with doing good for the Lord, and look for a good life is a part of or reflection on the goodness of God. In other words, the love of man to God is reflected through the love of the religious followers to every creature of God (el-Fadl, 2005: 281).

Although the reality in some parts of the world show the various images of 'bad even terrible' from the religion (Islam), both in the society adopting a modern de-

mocracy or liberal democracy, the religion (Islam) remains the choice for millions of people as their moral guidance. The questions are; how and which Islam indicates that scary side? The answer to this question is certainly not simple. The answer requires a comprehensive understanding about Islam including the type of followers, socio-cultural conditions in which Islam is practiced, and the problems under the name of Islam which arise.

Abu Khaled el-Fadl (2005: 3-5) recognizes that there are some challenging elements in understanding the situation of today's Muslims, especially the inappropriate actions (radicalism and terrorism) among Muslims. Perhaps, most Muslims would express its opposition to the inappropriate actions. But the reality cannot be denied that the media had already brought alleges that Islam is intolerant, radical, and even supporting extremism actions. For Muslims who are concerned with religion, they certainly get annoyed and angry to several allegations of the media. Because in fact, in many parts of the world, there are millions of people who embrace, believe, and find their peaceful life through the teachings of Islam. They strongly believe that Islam is a source of peace, ethics, and moral guidance in their daily life.

Indonesia itself, although it is internationally recognized as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, it is not an Islamic state. Indonesia is the Pancasila state, where the freedom of all citizens to hold and practice the religion and belief guaranteed by the constitution. The official law which is practiced in Indonesia is not Islamic law. But still, the negative image of Islam in the international community through some media coverage has direct negative effect on Muslims in Indonesia, especially after the Bali bombing in 2002, the growing trend of intolerance and radicalism (ICRP, 2011), and even the recent emergence of a particular group support for ISIS movement in Indonesia. Not to mention, the arrest of the person accused of being terrorists and some of those who are thought to be involved in the terrorism action are

from the Islamic boarding school or *Pesantren*. These phenomena have increased the negative image of Islam in the eyes of the world. Even some parties, who actually do not know exactly about the life in *Pesantren*, then generalize the notion that *Pesantren* in Indonesia as a base for terrorists.

In fact, Indonesian Islam is very different from the Islam in several parts of the world. Indonesian Islam is not type of Islam in Middle East that was initially brought to Indonesia. Indonesian Islam is a typical Indonesian Islam: Islam has become one with the local socio-cultural background of Indonesia: a moderate and tolerant. In the daily life of Muslims in Indonesia, Islam can hardly be separated with the local culture. It is recognized by Clifford Geertz, that Indonesian people, especially those who are living in Java island where the majority of the population is Muslim, are moderate and tolerant (Geertz, 1973: 53). Even in their everyday social life and neighborhood, they are very harmonious although their religions/beliefs are different. All of this is not merely because they are Muslims, but also because the value has internalized within Javanese culture in their social life as a way of life. For example, if there are members of the public who are not considered to be well-behaved in accordance with the existing rules/norms, then that person will not be regarded as a 'un-Islamic', but they are called as 'un-*njawani*': referring to a person who does not understand or break the Javanese norms and culture (Geertz, 1959: 367).

One of the social institutions that has a big contribution in preserving the values of Islam Indonesia is *Madrasah*. This institution has a major role in spreading the Islamic teaching in Java and Indonesia in general. And those who become teachers in *Madrasah* in the village are mostly *Kyai* (Religious leader). If they are not *Kyai/imam*, at least they are *Kyai/Imam* in mosque (*Langgar*-in Javanese language).

One of the areas in Java Island which still has thick and strong influence from the *Madrasah* and the teachers toward people's lives is at Maredan Village, District Dempet, Demak, Central Java. Their social life is ar-

guably quite unique and worthy to serve as an example dealing with the life in the globalization era: the decreasing spiritual dimension of human, religion teaching tends to be judged in black and white, even the level of pragmatism and materialism of life is stronger in corrupting people's thoughts. For over generations until today, the *Kyai* in that village remain faithful to guide and teach the children and the community about the values of typical Indonesian Islam: tolerant, moderate, and does not ignore the noble values of culture.

Exposing the lived experience of *Kyai Kampung* to the public is expected to be an inspiration to many parties in practicing and delivering the values of Islam in daily life from generation to generation, without pushing out the local cultural roots. Although they do not close themselves off from the profane life, but in everyday life, both in social, cultural, political, and economic, instructions or 'discourse' of the *Kyai Kampung* is still regarded as the main reference in community.

What meaning can be learned from the life of the *Kyai Kampung* as bearer of Islam and culture? What are significance and role of *Kyai Kampung* life and experience in social, cultural, political, economic, and religious community in Maredan Village? Those are the objectives of this study.

MAREDAN VILLAGE

People in Maredan Village generally work as farmers. Although there are some of them who work as civil servant, traders, as well as a carpenter, but they still own and manage the fields. Although not all of them have the same opportunities to access the formal education, especially to the college level, but the majority of people can read and write, especially in Arabic. This situation is because almost all of them have studied in *Madrasah*. Even some parents are more concerned on the *Madrasah* education for their children as compared to the conventional public education.

The mentioned *Madrasah* is not the *Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah* (MI), *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs), and *Madrasah Aliyah* (MA)

which are equivalent to the formal education of elementary school, junior high school, and senior high school. The mentioned *Madrasah* purely contains material about Islamic religious education (*Madrasah diniyyah*). However, the majority of residents in this village send their children to the *Madrasah* although their children still attend the formal schooling (elementary school/junior high school/senior high school) in the morning. The process of learning and teaching in this *madrasah* takes place from 1.30 pm to 4.30pm.

Sociologically, the social relations of people in Maredan village are very warm, familiar, and harmonious. They have strong kinship or brotherhood based on blood ties, which in terms of sociology it is called *gemeinschaft* relationship (Richard and van Loon, 2002: 63). Islam teaching values serve as the foundation and standard of living in their daily life. Although structurally, there are governance officials of village, but in any village decision-making meeting, the *Kyai Kampung* are always involved to be the community referral.

As generally found in Java, particularly in the North Coast region, *Kyai Kampung* is always regarded as the community referral. From social stratification, they belong to the 'elite' class. Even within a particular context, they are regarded as people who 'have special power' (an extraordinary persons), because of their knowledge and piety (Dhofier: 1994: 55).

Although the values of Islam is very strong in people who live in Kampung Maredan, but the values and cultural practices that are not derived from the Islamic tradition are maintained and become everyday sights; starting from the birth of a child *selametan* tradition (ceremony of gratitude), naming a child, marriage, even to the death of a family member in community. Everything is practiced and they never question whether the traditions belong to Islam or not (Geertz, 1959: 11).

PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

The *Kyai Kampung* in this study refers to those who, beside becomes the *ustad*/teach-

er in Madrasah '*Tasywiqul Musytarsyidin*', also become Kyai in Mosque of Maredan village.

With a phenomenological approach, the description and reflection on the life of the kyai village can be investigated in-depth. This approach is able to explore the deepest meaning behind the reality of the dynamic relationship that is practiced by the *Kyai Kampung* in delivering the dialogues about local culture and values of Islam in people's daily life. This dynamic relationship, directly or indirectly, is able to give a great effect personally and socially. This is because phenomenology itself, according to Ramirez, is a basic approach which emphasizes the human character as a research subject.

Phenomenology is an approach which is based on the human character as its subject matter. As a human approach, it uses 'lived experiences' (the consciousness of social phenomena) as facts on which to base its findings. And the Phenomenologist, those who wish to understand on certain types of social phenomenon is expected to make explicit his/her own consciousness, his/her own experience of the particular class of social phenomenon being studied, reflect on the meaning of call now experience, and relate its meaning to the general social situation as well as to the history of that situation. Furthermore, it is an approach by which the subjects of the research may know themselves, question themselves and consciously reflect on the reality of reviews their lives and reviews their socio-cultural milieu (Ramirez, 1983: 153-154).

The subjective experience and information of the co-researcher (research subjects) become the main data of the research. The direct involvement of the researcher and the co-researcher as well as the presence of consciousness of a phenomenon becomes the basic instruments in the process of data collection. Those information and experience are then used to excavate a meaning. This meaning is unwittingly able to affect the lives of the surrounding community. The data validation is intersubjective as stated by Ramirez in the following explanaton:

From the different angles and profiles, phenomenology strips the phenomenon of its surface appearances and culls out the perceived 'nucleus of truth', the essence, the '*eidos*'. And its validation is not statistical, but 'intersubjective'. It comes from an "*aha*" experience from those who read and listen to one's eidetic insight. It is a "phenomenological nod" / an expression to describe the Exclamation of person, who is struck by what the Phenomenologist culls out from the phenomenon in question and says, "Yes, that is true. I have never thought of that before (Ramirez, 2006: 22-23).

Therefore, the phenomenological approach is hermeneutical, intuitive, and dialectical. It is hermeneutical because the basic experience and social facts are connected in an environment in which the concrete existence is always originated or in accordance with the social and historical context. It is intuitive because it includes the appeared concept and its deepest meaning. And it is dialectical because the process: impressions and experiences of a person will be confirmed, modified, or crosschecked from what others (co-researcher) say and think (Strasser, 1963: 249-259).

THE PRINCIPLES OF LIFE AS CAPITAL FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

From the process of data gathering on the life experience of *Kyai Kampung* in Maredan Village, it is revealed that there are at least three important things that become the basis or foundation of their lives. These three things, besides being reflected in their daily personal lives of the Kyai, also serve as the inspiration that can affect the life of surrounding community.

The first is knowledge. For *Kyai Kampung*, knowledge is the key for any individual if they want to know the meaning and purpose of life. For them, without knowledge, human is not different than animals. With knowledge, human being will be able to distinguish, understand, and choose the good and bad for his life, so he will not

fall in the chaos and will not engage in any detrimental conducts to others. With knowledge, *Kyai Kampung* believes that man will be placed on a more respectable level in life. Only people who have knowledge are believed to be trusted by God as the caliph (leader) on earth (*khilafatullah fi al-ardi*); to keep the world from destruction (Dawood, 2003: 13). Therefore, the *Kyai Kampung* also believes that studying it is compulsory for every Muslim from since they are born until they die (Zarnuji, 1963: 4, 36).

The principle of life is in line with the essence of the word Islam itself: *rahmatan lil 'alamiin*, as reflected in the word '*salam*' which means peace (el-Fadl, 2005: 209). This peace is not meant only for himself, but also for others. This condition, according to *Kyai Kampung*, can only be achieved if a man has knowledge. Only with knowledge, a man can be an open-minded and humble individual towards others, so they can recognize themselves (as caliph *fi al-ardi*). It brings the social implications in which people can recognize, accept, and live side by side with/each other. In other words, only with knowledge, a human can understand and accept that life is full of diversity. That diversity is not supposed to be denied, but to complement each other so that life can be more beautiful and harmonious. This is where the basic foundation to be a good man; knowing how to live well and properly, so that they can find a way to get closer to God (Jamaluddin, 1323 (H): 5).

The second is *ikhlas* (being sincere). Terminologically, this sentence is defined as any action which is done only because of God, not because of the other; both material

and immaterial factors (Jamaluddin, 1323 (H): 368). In teaching activities for example, *Kyai Kampung* believes it as part of *jihad fi sabilillah*. Teaching, for them, must be done with sincerity upon the idea that the knowledge being owned and taught to students can be a blessing; make people's lives more peaceful and harmonious. For them, teaching is not a job, but an obligation. It is a duty for every Muslim who has the capacity and capability to realize a peaceful and harmonious society. Teaching is considered as an assignment from God to keep the world in order and unbroken: by keeping the future generations to not fall down into misery (Al-Ghozali, 1957: 9-12).

The third is togetherness. If the first and second principals which are categorized as personal sides (more on the individual experience and belief), the third principal is the concrete manifestation from the internalization and externalization of the first and second basic values. If the man already has the knowledge and sincerity in implementing their knowledge, it is believed that his life will be able to co-exist with others. Here is the essence of Islamic life: togetherness and acceptance toward the differences peacefully. This is at least seen in the context of everyday social interaction: although their social status is in the category of 'elite', but *Kyai Kampung* keeps on implementing and participating in various activities with other community members; such as voluntary work to clean the village.

If the two basic principles (first and second) which are categorized as personal side is completely internalized in everyday life, they must also be realized in a real acti-

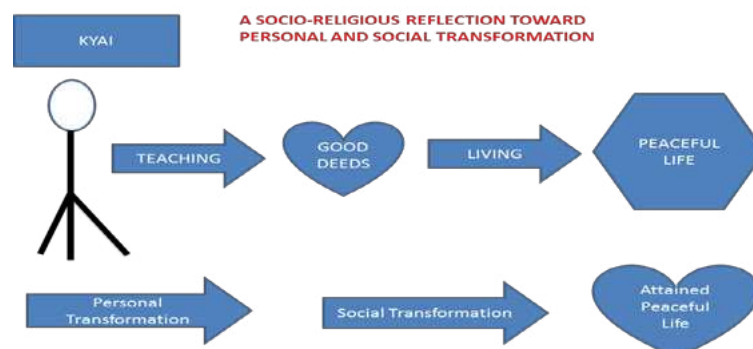


Chart 1. Process of personal transformation

on (as a form of externalization) which can be seen, felt, and even emulated by community. The pattern of life and actions of *Kyai Kampung* is then objectified, internalized, and followed (as a form of externalization) by people in everyday life in the Maredan village. This is where personal transformation gives effect in the form of social transformation. The process of change is generally carried out in the absence of coercion and intimidation. It is done through the peaceful action process. Illustration of the process of personal transformation towards social transformation is as shown in chart 1.

The above chart shows that *Kyai Kampung*, as an individual with his knowledge, practices and teaches the values of the good life to the people sincerely (non-materialistic) with the goal of achieving a peaceful life. The objective is believed to be achieved only by living and cooperating with others (non-individualistic).

The lived experience of *Kyai Kampung* in the Maredan village is really directly felt by local community. It can be seen from the public perception on the *Kyai Kampung* collected through surveys. Taking into account the high degree of homogeneity of community in Kampung Maredan and the role of Head of Family (KK) in the social life of rural communities, the target responses were the heads of the a household. With a sample size of 10% (Gay, 1976) and simple random sampling, out of 279 KK, there were 30 families as respondents. Here is the central role of *Kyai* in the process of social transformation. *Kyai Kampung* has significant roles in life, not only in religious affairs, but also in terms of social, cultural, political, and economic affairs.

In a religious context, it is clearly seen that all respondents believed the *Kyai Kampung* as person who is more religious (who better knows and understands the religious affairs) than those who is not *Kyai*. Hence, all respondents also expressed approval that *Kyai Kampung* is model/example for them to be a good human being.

The agreement of the respondents on the central role of the *Kyai* is also seen in the socio-cultural context. All respondents ag-

reed that the *Kyai Kampung* become their reference socially and culturally, including in maintaining and preserving local cultural values.

The response was a little different when respondents were asked about the role of *Kyai* in the context of politics (political leadership election: head of the village, mayor, and President). There was a bit of a different trend. Although there were about 10 percent of respondents say that they did not agree that *Kyai Kampung* as the reference in determining the political choice, but the majority (66.7 percent) still regarded *Kyai Kampung* as a reference to their political choices, and the rest (23.3 percent) said that they did not know or had no answer. However, when people were asked about the inclusion of *Kyai Kampung* in the process of creating good governance, the majority of respondents (96.7 percent) agreed, and only (3.3 percent) disagreed.

Similarly, in an economic context, when people were asked about the role of *Kyai Kampung* in economic development, the majority of respondents (93.4 percent) agreed and followed the advice of *Kyai* to develop a productive economy non-exploitatively, and the rest (6.7 percent) answer did not know or had no answer.

The above response on the role of *Kyai* was also in line with the respondents' answers to the statement that the *Kyai* as the guidance in their daily lives in Kampung Maredan community. The majority of respondents (86.7 percent) agreed, (6.7 percent) disagreed, and (6.7 per cent) did not know or had no answer.

The importance of *Kyai Kampung* role in people's daily lives in Kampung Maredan as stated above is in line with what is said by Zamaksyari Dhofier that *Kyai* becomes the most essential element, not only in *Pesantren*, but also for the surrounding community, even in national-wide. *Kyai* is believed to have more knowledge, especially in understanding the Qur'an and the *Hadith*, and understand the majesty of God and the wisdom of living in the world. Therefore, *Kyai* is often referred to as an extraordinary person (Dhofier, 1994: 55-60).

The reality that the *Kyai* has a central and significant role in the social life of the society is also recorded in the history of Indonesian civilization. *Kyai*, with a number of attributes which are attached to him, is an important role in the formation of Indonesian society. *Kyai* not only contributes to strengthen and develop the religious aspects or morality in a narrow spectrum but also affects the various aspects of community life. *Kyai* plays an important role in the history of the establishment of the Indonesian Muslim community in almost all aspects of life - social, political, cultural - in addition to the religious aspects. Therefore, it is not surprising when Geertz refers *Kyai* as Cultural Brokers, because *Kyai* plays a position to mediate local community and national governance, in addition to expanding it in the broader context. As a cultural broker, *Kyai* also perceives to have the ability and opportunity to be an actor that interprets and explains the relationship between the two worlds: "profane" and "sacred", between doctrine and practice of religion, between "God and the people", the "universal Islamic civilization" with "local Islamic traditions" (Geertz, 1960: 200-249).

Regarding to the role of the *Kyai* in the political aspect, the view of Horikoshi is relevant to be quoted here. He gives the attributes of *Kyai*'s involvement in politics with the term "political entrepreneurs", as it is believed that *Kyai* is the one who has the capacity to preserve his status and charisma to maintain its position in the community and as an agent of change and social transformation (Horikoshi, 1987). In addition, *Kyai* also is seen to have the ability to mediate communication between the interests of the government and Muslims people. It can be when the colonial period or pre-independence of Indonesia, *Kyai* was not only believed to perform the function as a disseminator of religion, but also a pioneer and driving resistance to various forms of colonialism. *Pesantren* or educational institution and its preaching served as "centers of resistance against the invaders". (Mudzhar, et al., 2012: 617-618).

Therefore, in the last general election

2014 (presidential election), it can be viewed clearly how the candidates were competing to approach and 'exploit' *Kyai*'s central role in the community to raise their popularity and electability. Although some parties have a negative view of *Kyai* because some *Kyais* are considered too elitist, or even pragmatic in politics, but the reality states that the support from *Kyai* (especially *Kyai Kampung*) toward one of the presidential candidates is regarded as a very significant political impact in the campaign especially in dismissing the various forms of black campaign.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the experience of a *kyai kampung* in Demak reveals the unique characteristics of religious leaders in Indonesia. They are typically shaped by a vibrant and rich religious tradition that gives tolerance to local culture and emphasise the importance of sincerity, devotion and togetherness. The embodiment of these values in the the *kyai*'s life creates significant social transformation. *Kyai* therefore continually become an important actor in the social and cultural life of Muslims in Java.

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